

March 7, 2011

Good Afternoon Chairs and Members of the Finance Committee. My name is Jan Bartrop-Babbitt and I work with the FUSE program, at Chrysalis. FUSE is a pilot program designed to end the cycle of incarceration and homelessness. I am here to testify in support of Senate Bill 1008, the bonding bill that provides money for affordable and supportive housing.

The average man I have helped to house has been homeless for 15 years. The question I am asked over and over again is "How does someone remain homeless for 15 years?"

My response is always "If you are homeless how do you hold down a permanent job, with no address or stable location? How do you decide which of your worldly possessions you will keep – because you have to carry them with you, and store them in a locker at a shelter? How do you bathe yourself and clean your clothing? Where do you use the bathroom when you don't have anywhere to belong?" Homeless people are moving from place to place for eight hours a day because they don't have anywhere they legitimately belong.

After trying to avoid loitering charges, trespassing issues, or simply being told to move on when they seek shelter from the rain by stopping in front of a storefront to stand under the awning; they end their day out by standing in a line hoping to find a shelter bed, so they don't have to sleep on the street that night.

How do you accumulate first, last and security for an apartment? What landlord wants to rent from you when you have no recent references? How do you buy furniture? How do you go to sleep and wake up every day in a room with 100 other people? How do you simply keep hoping for a better life?"

Offering a man affordable housing means that you offer him hope. With a stable place to call home, the knowledge that you will have a bed to sleep in each night, and even something as simple as opening your own refrigerator to have a glass of juice is uplifting? I will not quote the financial benefits of affordable housing for a state's budget. You are all aware.

Instead I will ask each of you to consider a homeless person when you unlock your front door this evening, secure in the knowledge that you not only have possessions but they will be right where you left them...because you had a place to leave them. I will ask you to ponder the safety of turning off your bedroom light and slipping beneath the sheets. I hope you will pause for a moment when you pour your first cup of coffee and consider that there are people who are packing up all their belongings and preparing to walk the streets for the day, and that there are people who do not have coffee, or a cup, or a chair to sit on.

Not all homeless people are strangers. They are mothers and sons, they are children and the elderly, would it be easier to help if it was your mother or your child? Please count the many ways your life is good and as you count please consider making the life of another human being more dignified. Housing matters. Please help.

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